

*Statement of Bart Farrell
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*Statement before the Energy & Commerce Health Subcommittee
"Waste and Duplication in the USDA Catfish Inspection Program"
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.
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Mr. Chairman and Subcommittee members, my name is Bart Farrell, and I am the Director of Food and Beverages for the Clyde's Restaurant Group. The Clyde's Restaurant Group is a local, privately-owned company with 14 restaurants in Washington, D.C., Maryland and Northern Virginia. We are 2,300 employees strong and provide hundreds of thousands of memorable dining experiences for people from all over the world every year. No doubt many of you have dined in one of our restaurants and may know somebody that has worked at a Clyde's Restaurant during our 53 years in business. Besides the Clyde's brand, we also operate the Old Ebbitt Grill, The Hamilton, and the 1789 Restaurant in Georgetown.

I am speaking today from both a Clyde's perspective, but also as a leader of the more than 100 local chefs who have expressed support for eliminating the USDA catfish program, because it threatens an important new fishery that can help save the Chesapeake Bay.

Clyde's Supports Local Processors and Fishing Communities

Clyde's is a proud supporter and customer of oyster harvesters, watermen, fishermen and livestock producers from Maryland, Delaware, Virginia and North Carolina. Five of our largest vendors for food and supplies operate their businesses in the state of Maryland. Congressional Seafood, based in Jessup, MD, is our seafood supplier and has been for many years.

Wild Blue Catfish Are Destroying the Chesapeake Bay

Several years ago Congressional Seafood introduced us to the Chesapeake Bay Wild Blue Catfish as a new menu item. It is relatively inexpensive as seafood items go but with an alarming back story. These fish were introduced into the James River in the 1970s as a sport fish for recreational fishermen. Unfortunately, these are apex predators ... they sit at the top of the food chain in the Bay with no known predators of their own. According to NOAA, these fish have taken over and now account for a staggering 75% of the biomass in the James and Rappahannock Rivers, and are increasing in many of the other tributary rivers in the area, thus doing significant

harm to the Chesapeake Bay's ecosystem.¹ They are consuming the Bay's native fisheries (rockfish/striped bass, blue crabs, white perch, shad, herring, menhaden, etc.). According to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, one of the primary ways to reduce the population of these blue catfish and ensuring the survival of the native fisheries is to establish and grow a commercial fishery for the blue catfish.

Clyde's, Other Restaurants, and Retailers Seek to Market Wild Blue Catfish

Several companies are leading the way at growing this new fishery. These fish are becoming more and more popular at Clyde's and other restaurants throughout the region. Stores like Whole Foods, Wegmans and Safeway have successfully created a market for blue catfish. Our staff and customers are educated on this invasive species and not only enjoy eating a quality, good tasting fish but also having a sense of civic pride in doing their part to help save the Bay!

The Wild Blue Catfish Supply Chain, From Water to Table

To briefly explain how wild blue catfish gets to you as a consumer at Clyde's: Watermen in the Chesapeake or in North Carolina or Delaware catch the fish. Processors cut the fish into forms that chefs like. Distributors send the fish to retailers or restaurants. Consumer order the fish at meals away from home or buy at shops to take home and cook. Each of these steps is essential to getting the fish to the market. A break in any step will eliminate the market.

I am going to share an example from one company. In the past two years Murray L. Nixon Fishery out of Edenton, North Carolina alone has bought an estimated 2.5 million pounds of catfish with an estimated value of \$1 million from watermen. These numbers have increased over the past five years due to the increase of the blue catfish in their area. This company calculates that in 2015 there were 591 commercial waterman who landed catfish and approximately 100 dealers with employees who handled catfish in North Carolina.

The catfish processing at Murray L. Nixon Fishery allows this small business to keep a local fulltime staff of cutters working and in that way support local labor, despite the net restrictions, species limits, and seasonal availability that apply to other fish and that otherwise would limit the need for fulltime staff.

Our supplier, Chesapeake Seafood, provides a similar service to Clyde's.

USDA Catfish Program Impact on Our Supply Chain

The USDA catfish program will require our suppliers to follow regulations of both USDA (for catfish) and FDA (for all other seafood that they process). While wild blue catfish is a good

¹ See NOAA's fact sheet called, "Invasive Catfish," at <http://www.chesapeakebay.noaa.gov/fish-facts/invasive-catfish>.

business, it will not justify the significant expense of capital and ongoing costs associated with meeting USDA's different regulatory requirements. As a result, many processors and distributors have indicated that they will leave the wild blue catfish business unless regulation of catfish is returned to FDA. Such a rational business decision will mean the supply chain between local waterman and the restaurants will be broken. The result:

1. Watermen lose the opportunity to be employed fully through the year;
2. Restaurants lose the opportunity sell a new and delicious fish; and
3. Chesapeake Bay and rivers in North Carolina, Virginia, Maryland and Delaware all suffer from the unfished, invasive species of wild blue catfish.

More than 100 chefs, from nationally-known to locally-owned restaurants, signed a letter to Congressional leaders urging them eliminate the USDA catfish program and keep seafood safety at FDA.² We remain hopeful the House of Representatives will take the opportunity to vote on the Senate-passed S.J Res 28, which would do just that. As someone who has spent many hours enjoying the Chesapeake Bay and all of its wonders, I trust you will do your part to ensure that the Bay stays relevant and healthy with all of its native species for generations to come. A failure to act will say much about Congress' commitment to the Bay.

² I have attached that letter.

Chefs Supporting the Chesapeake Bay

We are chefs from the District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia, Delaware and central Pennsylvania. We represent a diverse group of restaurants and foodservice facilities. We speak with one voice when it comes to supporting a healthy and balanced ecosystem in the Chesapeake Bay. We ask that you help us preserve the Bay and support the watermen and communities that depend on it.

Some facts of which you should be aware:

- Wild blue catfish are an invasive species, now found in the Chesapeake Bay and most of its tributaries. Some tributaries have a biomass of these fish at greater than 70%.
- Wild blue catfish can live up to 20 years and grow to over 100 pounds in size. Their footprint is spreading throughout the Chesapeake Bay and beyond.
- Wild blue catfish are apex predators with no known predator of their own. They eat anything and everything before them and now pose the single greatest threat to the Bay's ecosystem by consuming native species such as rockfish, shad, perch, and blue crabs.
- Conservation groups and state natural resource departments are deeply concerned about the serious and negative impacts of wild blue catfish on the Bay's ecosystem.
- Watermen, at the urging of state agencies, are now catching wild blue catfish and reducing the fish's impact on the Bay.
- Seafood companies in the District of Columbia, Maryland, Virginia, Delaware and central Pennsylvania support their restaurant and grocery store customers by processing wild blue catfish.
- These local seafood companies have created a market for these abundant and relatively inexpensive fish. Restaurants and grocery stores throughout the region have had great success marketing this fish to their customers.
- Watermen and the Bay communities in which they live are benefitting from fishing year round, as a result of the harvest of wild blue catfish.
- The USDA Catfish Inspection Program will require seafood companies that supply wild blue catfish to adhere to USDA regulation for catfish and FDA oversight for all other seafood.
- Seafood companies have stated that they will stop processing wild blue catfish if they are subject to regulation by two, separate food safety agencies. Seafood companies view this a burden and will not commit the additional financial resources to comply with yet another government agency.
- The Government Accountability Office has deemed the USDA Catfish Inspection Program as duplicative and wasteful.
- If seafood companies will not process the fish, the chain of providing wild catfish from the Chesapeake and its tributaries to our regional restaurants and grocery stores will be broken.
- The Chesapeake Bay and its watersheds, our customers, the watermen that harvest these fish and their communities will all lose.

Eliminating the USDA catfish program is good for our customers and the American taxpayer.

Eliminating the USDA catfish program is good for the Bay watermen and their communities.

Eliminating the USDA catfish program is good environmental stewardship for the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed.

We urge you to take the steps necessary to eliminate the USDA catfish program and ensure that the harvest of wild blue catfish continues. Please restore ALL seafood inspections back in the capable hands of the FDA.

Respectfully,

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